

# socialist standard

June 2014  
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Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain - Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

## CAUTION: CAPITALISM AT WORK



Dogged or  
daff?  
page 9



Mything  
Scotland  
page 10



Trains, pork and  
war  
page 14

# socialist standard

JUNE 2014  
contents

## FEATURES

Scottish, English, who cares?	10
Euro elections in Ireland	12
Causes of WWI	14
Gold Bores	16

## REGULARS

Pathfinders	4
Halo Halo!	6
Cooking the Books	7
Material World	8
Greasy Pole	9
Cooking the Books	18
Mixed Media	19
Reviews	20
Proper Gander	21
Meetings	22
50 Years Ago	23
Action Replay	23
Voice from the Back	24
Free Lunch	24

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The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 5 July** at the address above. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the Editorial Committee.

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**South West Regional branch.** Meets 2nd Saturday of each month in the Railway Tavern, Salisbury, 2.00pm (check before attending). Shane Roberts, 86 High Street, Bristol BS5 6DN. Tel: 0117 9511199

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**Newtownabbey:** Nigel McCullough. Tel: 028 90852062.

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<http://geocities.com/edinburghbranch/>

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# Introducing The Socialist Party

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The Socialist Party is like no other political party in Britain. It is made up of people who have joined together because we want to get rid of the profit system and establish real socialism. Our aim is to persuade others to become socialist and act for themselves, organising democratically and without leaders, to bring about the kind of society that we are advocating in this journal. We are solely concerned with building a movement of socialists for socialism. We are not a reformist party with a programme of policies to patch up capitalism.

We use every possible opportunity to make

new socialists. We publish pamphlets and books, as well as CDs, DVDs and various other informative material. We also give talks and take part in debates; attend rallies, meetings and demos; run educational conferences; host internet discussion forums, make films presenting our ideas, and contest elections when practical. Socialist literature is available in Arabic, Bengali, Dutch, Esperanto, French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish as well as English.

The more of you who join The Socialist Party the more we will be able to get our ideas across, the more experiences we

will be able to draw on and greater will be the new ideas for building the movement which you will be able to bring us.

The Socialist Party is an organisation of equals. There is no leader and there are no followers. So, if you are going to join we want you to be sure that you agree fully with what we stand for and that we are satisfied that you understand the case for socialism.

**If you would like more details about The Socialist Party, complete and return the form on page 23.**



# socialist standard

JUNE 2014

## Editorial

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### In the recovery position?

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THE NEWSPAPERS that have been full of talk about the economic crisis since 2008 have all of a sudden decided that an economic recovery is under way. Government statistics show that after falling sharply, GDP in the UK is just about back to where it was before the slump began. Average wage increases have now almost caught up with inflation, after lagging prices for years. And on an almost daily basis newspapers like the *Express* and *Mail* trumpet the recent rises in house prices, rather like a child excitedly waving about a toy they've found in the lucky dip.

We've been here before of course. This is how all economic recoveries happen. The big fish that dominate things eat the little fish and get even bigger and stronger as a result. Their growing confidence is such they may even try to gobble up other big fish too – we can see this by the recent attempt from US pharmaceutical giant Pfizer to buy AstraZeneca. Both profits and wages start to rise again and so demand for goods and services starts to pick up. And the politicians that had been so obviously impotent to tackle all the pressing issues during the slump claim that it is their unique foresight and mastery of the economy that has brought about the feel-good factor.

In truth, it is very rare for slumps to be caused by politicians

and even rarer for them to have any real, discernible impact on a recovery. Ever since its development in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the market economy has always suffered periodic crises and slumps, whether under Tory, Liberal, Labour or Coalition governments. Slumps are part of the market's internal renewal and survival mechanism, right across the world. Far from governments running the market economy, it is – for all intents and purposes – the ups and downs of the economy that fundamentally influences what governments can really do.

George Osborne hasn't yet been quite as foolish as Gordon Brown was when he claimed Labour had 'abolished boom and bust'. But he is still foolish enough not to realise that the economic recovery – such as it currently is – will yet again lay the foundations for profit-hungry over-investment during boom times, and an over-expansion of key industries and services in relation to paying demand for them. And linked with this, of course, more unsustainable financial bubbles too as the 'innovators', 'entrepreneurs' and speculators move in. These classic market forces will all serve to trigger the next slump – and no doubt the rise of yet another gang of political tricksters claiming, against all the evidence of history, that they can fix it.

## Polio – back from the brink



A FACT about infectious diseases which deserves to be better known is that the closer you come to eradicating them, the more potentially dangerous they become. A case in point is polio, which the world came to within an ace of wiping out only to see it resurge to the point where last month the World Health Organisation declared a public health emergency (*New Scientist*, 10 May). The approach of spring rains in the northern hemisphere prompted the WHO to call for immediate vaccination

drives after outbreaks in Syria, where such programmes have been interrupted by war and poor sanitation conditions in rebel-held areas, but also in Cameroon and Pakistan, where Muslim imams have notoriously claimed that vaccination was a western plot to sterilise their children. Vaccination is also strongly opposed in Nigeria by the guerrilla group Boko Haram, whose other recent contributions to civilisation have included abducting 200 schoolgirls to sell as sex-slaves and blowing up a hospital. Boko Haram (No to Western Education) is by the way a fine example of militant ignorance gone mad and a sobering reminder to socialists that if liberal capitalism were ever to collapse as some on the left delight in prophesying, there are groups out there who would love nothing better than to push the world back to the Stone Age.

To get an idea how pervasive polio was only a generation or so ago, consider what connects the following famous people: Alan Alda, Neil Young, Arthur C Clarke, Jack Nicklaus, Francis Ford Coppola, Lord Snowdon, Mia Farrow, Ida Lupino, Donald Sutherland, David Starkey and Johnny Weissmuller. No prizes given, and we didn't even mention more famous polio victims like Franklin D Roosevelt, Frida Kahlo or Ian Dury.

The 1952 polio epidemic was the worst outbreak in US history, with 58,000 cases. In 2013 there were just 417 cases worldwide. This year so far there have been 68 confirmed cases. This may not sound like a lot, and it isn't, so one might wonder why the WHO is ringing alarm bells so quickly. It's because vaccination programmes don't aim to vaccinate everyone, owing to the practical difficulties and expense, they generally aim for 'herd immunity'. If a sufficient percentage of individuals are vaccinated in a group, those at risk of infection do not come into contact with each other and the virus is blocked by natural buffers. But if the percentage drops below the threshold level herd immunity breaks down, at which point an epidemic becomes sustainable. Consider this on a global scale, with modern air transport, and you begin to see why the WHO is worried. Syria, Cameroon and Pakistan are all known to be exporting the disease.

One doctor working in Dier ez-Zor, the province of Syria which first saw the outbreak, was quoted in December as saying "This is a disease. This is not politics" ([npr.org/health](http://npr.org/health), 2 December 2013). If only that were true. There would not have been an outbreak in the first place had it not been for the political situation. But diseases can be instruments of war as well as symptoms. In May 2010 this column discussed the eradication of smallpox, one of the towering achievements of modern science. Yet stockpiles of the virus continue to be held at the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, USA and at the State

Research Centre for Virology and Biotechnology in Koltsovo, Russia. Why? As Gareth Williams, professor of medicine at Bristol University, points out, these stockpiles have not been instrumental in any significant research into virology which might justify their continued existence. Meanwhile, because no virus exists in the wild there is effectively zero immunity among populations, and only derisory stocks of vaccine available in the case of accidental or deliberate release. The consequences would be truly biblical, which is why Professor Williams insists the stockpiles should be destroyed immediately (*New Scientist*, 17 May). Politically speaking, though, the stockpiles can be seen as an Ace of Spades in a pack of potential war cards, which may be why the WHO has been unable to enforce destruction despite five previous attempts, and why the US and Russia both oppose destruction.

## Priorities turned upside down



THE VERDICT is partially in concerning the sinking of the Korean ferry Sewol in April with the confirmed loss of 276 people – mostly high school students

– and 23 still unaccounted for (*BBC News Online*, 16 May). It is still not clear why the ferry made a sudden sharp turn off the coast of Jindo island, but the cause of the resulting list and eventual capsizing has become clear – it was overloaded and top-heavy. The ferry owners had redesigned the upper decks to create additional passenger space, and it had passed a Korean safety inspection only under the proviso that it would need to carry more ballast and cut down its cargo capacity in order to offset this extra weight. It seems that the owners chose to ignore this proviso and that the ferry was routinely overloaded despite a warning by an off-duty captain that this was making the ferry unstable. The cargo allowance was set at 987 tonnes while ballast load was set at 1,568 tonnes. When the ship sank it was carrying 3,608 tonnes of cargo, three and a half times the permitted amount, with ballast of just 580 tonnes, around a third of the requirement. Since ballast is held at the bottom of the hull while cargo and passengers are both above the water-line, it's clear that the ferry was not only overloaded but top-heavy. The sudden turn, for whatever reason, resulted in a Mary Rose-type disaster. Very likely, vehicles and cargo broke their ties and slid across the decks, tipping the listing ship completely over.

All the media fuss, the Prime Minister's resignation and the President's apology, has been to do with how the disaster was handled, including the captain's supposedly bad advice to stay put and not risk the water until rescue boats were on hand, and the slowness of the recovery of bodies, even though one diver died in the treacherous conditions. Socialists won't be astonished that the surviving crew were the first to get the blame for the disaster itself, although one crewmember died trying to save passengers. This is the usual scenario, with corporate bosses and shareholders doing everything they can to distance themselves from blame. Ultimately you don't need to be a socialist to see what was going on here – profits from carriage, shortcuts on safety, and blame the workers when the enterprise keels over and sinks like a stone.



## Bargain basement nationalism

Dear Editors

The UK Independence Party is clearly being sold to ordinary voters as a movement to liberate us all. And sadly many workers will back it. Yet as the article 'People Not Profits' mentions, UKIP is no alternative at all (Editorial, May *Socialist Standard*).

UKIP sells a kind of bargain-basement nationalism that seeks to blame workers outside the UK for our problems. It wants to close the borders, and substitute 'patriotism' for compassion. And its policies are designed to transfer even more wealth and income into the pockets of the rich.

It's the economic system that oppresses people, not those who move to the U.K. We need to reject the false ideology of nationalism UKIP promotes, as well as its economic ideas.

**Graeme Kemp, Wellington, Shropshire.**

## Blatant contrast

Dear Editors

Regarding the article on 15 Central Park West ('Voice from the Back', April *Socialist Standard*), some years ago I took a stroll of some of the streets where the buildings look out on to Central Park. The buildings, a mixture of mansions, hotels and apartment blocks, were beautiful and were obviously occupied by the wealthy. The streets which intersected with the prosperous-looking avenue contained some atrocious slums, many of which were right next to the above buildings. Here one saw a blatant and obvious contrast between wealth and poverty. It should have been enough to have the least perceptive onlooker wonder if perhaps there wasn't something wrong in a society that could create such extremes.

**Steve Shannon, Mississauga, Canada.**

## Compelling Case

Dear Editors

I just wanted to write and say I really enjoyed reading the three election manifestos and supporting article carried on pages 10 to 12 of the May *Socialist Standard*.

In clear, modern and accessible language, they all set out a powerful and compelling case for a world socialist society, and certainly inspired me to do something positive to bring this about!

**Andrew Northall** (by email)

## Middle Eastern Marxists?

Dear Editors

Perhaps the most striking part of the International Workers' Day demonstration on May Day 2014 was the large contingents of Turkish and Iranian 'communists' in London. Tens of attendees turned up parading plain red flags in co-ordinated outfits from organisations such as Alevi Federation, Day-Mer (ostensibly, the Turkish community centre in North London), RedHack, Worker Communist Parties of Iraq and Iran. Perhaps the most prominent figure inspiring some of these groups is the late Mansoor Hekmat (who died in 2002), who rejected both 'Stalinism' and Islamism and urged communists to 'go back to Marx'. Not in itself sufficient for a socialist, but if 'Marxist-Hekmatism' is popular enough for a 'Marx-Hekmat' society in London or in the large populations of Turkey or Iran, then perhaps it is worthy of further critique by the true socialists in London.

**DJW** (by email)

*Socialist Standard* June 2014

## The Socialist Party of Great Britain Summer School



**20th - 22nd June 2014  
Fircroft College, Birmingham**

Capitalism causes war. In the last hundred years there has been a proliferation of war: two world wars, countless other conflicts and civil wars, the Cold War with its threat of nuclear armageddon, and today the 'War on Terror'. Socialists do not support capitalist wars, which veil the class struggle by developing a false sense of identity between the working class and the capitalist class. The interests of the two classes are always antagonistic, and that is why as socialists we speak of the class war. Socialism means, among other things, internationalism, rather than nationalism which always contributes to war.

Our weekend of talks, workshops and discussion will examine the role of war in capitalism and how only socialism can abolish war from the Earth.

*Friday evening:* Adam Buick: Marx's attitude to war in his time: was he right or wrong?

*Saturday morning:* Gwynn Thomas: In whose interests? The Outbreak of the First World War

*Saturday afternoon:* Steve Clayton: 'The working class was in the saddle' Social revolution in The Spanish Civil War

*Saturday afternoon:* Richard Field: workshop on class war, gender wars and the war of all against all *Saturday evening:*

*Bill Martin:* Here come the WAR! robots - technology and warfare in capitalism

*Sunday morning:* Mike Foster: Life in the Cold War

Full residential rate: £80

Concessionary residential rate: £40

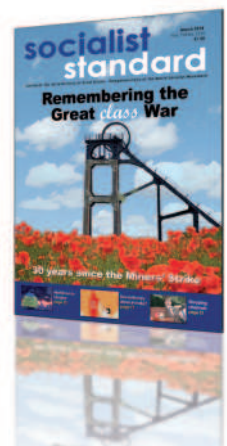
Day visitors are welcome, but please book in advance

To make a booking, send a cheque (payable to the Socialist Party of Great Britain) to Summer School, Sutton Farm, Aldborough, Boroughbridge, York, YO51 9ER

e-mail [spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk) with any enquiries

## FREE

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the *Socialist Standard*



See page 23 for further details



## Not with a bang, but a whimper

THE INTERNATIONAL Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Federation (ITGLWF) is, no doubt, a perfectly sensible, level-headed organisation, and unlikely to be involved with, or to have any connection with half-baked, bible thumping, doomsday merchants.

Unfortunately for them though, if you happen to be looking for information on a slightly less rational organisation which abbreviates its name to ITGWF, and which invites you to 'Get Your Tickets For the End of the World Spectacular', when you Google this, it is the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Federation's website that comes up at the top of the list. In fact, it takes a while to find the loony ITGWF (which, in this case, stands for 'Invitation to God's Wedding Feast').

It is also important to note here that when they talk about 'God's wedding feast', what they actually mean is Armageddon, the final, catastrophic battle between the forces of good and evil, in which (it has already been decided, apparently) the good guys are going to win. And it seems this is going to be one hell of a party – for God at least. The website includes numerous details of what slaughter, carnage and destruction is planned, helpful bible references to the horror, and exciting, in-depth revelations of what to expect as the Resurrection, Armageddon, the Final Battle of all Time and the Final Judgement are all played out, and much, much more. 'His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written that no man knew but he himself, And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in

blood: and his name is called the Word of God', for example.

It's not often that God lays on a party so it ought to be a good one. There will be fireworks, balloons and a barbeque no doubt. Music will perhaps be provided by a heavenly choir, and hopefully there will be a display of riding skills by the four horsemen of the apocalypse. The evening will then be rounded off with Satan being chained up for 1,000 years. So if you want to be there, book your tickets now.

Hopefully, in case of rain it can all be transferred indoors, but to be honest it doesn't sound like fun-filled family entertainment. We hate to put a damper on things, but for an Armageddon do we were hoping for a bit more. It's certainly not what the Socialist Party would put on if we were planning an event for the end of the world.

And another thing, until all this was announced getting in to heaven at the end of time was going to be *much* simpler. Even for those of us who don't qualify for a proper invitation. Until this lot came on the scene, all you had to do was to state that you believe that Jesus is your Lord and saviour, repent of your sins, and at the very most, be born again.

Apart from being born again it was easy. You simply had to tell the guy at the pearly gates, God, or Saint Peter, or whoever, that you believed and repented, and that was it. You could be the most devious, lecherous, foul mouthed old humbug ever to have slithered through the turnpike, but as long as you repented, you were in. And if they've changed the rules for that, then it is obviously a matter of concern, for some of us, at least.

So all in all, this organisation's 'End of the World Spectacular' may not be everyone's cup of tea. I wonder if the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers have any better plans for the event?

NW



## Socialist Euroelection campaign

IN LAST month's festival of xenophobia that the European elections were the Socialist Party mounted its biggest election campaign yet, emphasising by contrast the world nature of any solution by putting 'World Socialist Movement' on the ballot paper alongside our name. We contested two regions, South East England and Wales. Contesting Wales entitled us to our first ever Party Election Broadcast. This can be viewed on Youtube here: <http://tinyurl/lcrrbs4>.

The South East Region is the largest in the country with an electorate of over 6 million in 4 million households. Royal Mail delivered 984,000 households in 20 selected constituencies such as Oxford, Brighton, Southampton, Reading, Canterbury, and Dover. A further 16,000 were distributed by members and sympathisers. In Wales Royal Mail delivered our manifesto to 342,000 households in 9 constituencies with a further 8,000 being distributed by us. In all, a total of 1.35 million, the biggest

ever campaign to publicise the case for a classless, stateless, moneyless world community without frontiers.

There was some good media coverage, especially from local TV and radio stations in both regions. One fall-out from our standing was that one of our candidates was interviewed on BBC2's Daily Politics Show, which would have had a much wider audience than our election broadcast in Wales. It can be seen at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-27472384](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-27472384). Press coverage was more patchy but a number of local papers did give us a chance to present our case in more than a sound-bite. A couple of examples can be

read here:

[www.canterburytimes.co.uk/Socialist-GB/story-21023599-detail/story.html](http://www.canterburytimes.co.uk/Socialist-GB/story-21023599-detail/story.html)

[www.carmarthenjournal.co.uk/gets-Euro-vote/story-21065363-detail/story.html](http://www.carmarthenjournal.co.uk/gets-Euro-vote/story-21065363-detail/story.html)

We got 5454 votes in the South East and 1384 in Wales.





## Towards a cashless society?

'CASH WAS king, but debit cards rule now' the *Times* (30 April) reported:

'Notes and coins now account for less than £1 in every £5 spent by British consumers, according to a new survey (...) Halifax found that cash is now used in 17 per cent of all transactions, while debit cards, the most popular way of paying, are used in more than half (...) Cash has also been overtaken by direct debit, which is used for just under 20 per cent of transactions.'

The following week Patrick Hosking speculated (*Times*, 6 May) in an article on 'contactless cards' (cards you simply swipe without having to key in a PIN and can use for payments up to £20) that this trend might go even further:

'For future historians looking back at social trends, it may just be the moment when the slow trudge towards a cashless society took a leap forward – a turning point when people chose to use plastic for even the tiniest purchases, whether a coffee, bus fare or newspaper.'

A cashless society? That's quite possible. The paper notes and metallic coins that are 'cash' are not money but only tokens for it and there is no reason in principle why they could be replaced by plastic cards to fulfil money's role as a means of payment. In practical terms of course this assumes a highly-developed IT infrastructure. And cash does have the advantage of being anonymous so that transactions using it cannot be traced, which is why some people will always prefer to use it, though Bitcoins and the like are an attempt to reproduce this electronically.

A cashless society would not be a moneyless society as serving as a means of payment is only one of money's functions. 'Money' is also a standard of price, a store of value and a unit of account. As an expression of price and a unit of account, money reflects in however a roundabout and indirect way the labour-time value of goods and services produced for sale ('commodities' in Marxian terminology). These days it is not a stable standard of price as it is official government policy to increase the general price level by around 2 percent a year. Money, even electronic money, is still a store of value, even though in insecure times people prefer to transform their wealth into something that it intrinsically valuable (such as gold or jewellery) or that will keep or increase its price (such as works of art).

It could be that the concept of a cashless society makes that of a moneyless society more plausible, but the replacement of cash by electronic transactions has given rise to all sorts of wild ideas of what money is and where it comes from. Despite the illusion that money is created by banks by a keyboard stroke, purchasing power arises in the first place out of production, either as the wages and salaries of the workers or as the realisable profits of the investors, together corresponding to the total value of what has been produced.

Unlike a cashless society, a moneyless society would be one in which goods and services would not be priced but would be freely available to take and use and in which the calculations involved in the production and distribution of useful goods and services would not be done in a single, general unit of account but simply in units measuring specific amounts of goods (weight, number, etc).

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Autodromo, once a fishing village now turned favela, and they are now threatened by eviction because of government plans to build the Olympic Park nearby, and documents reveal a plan to build a 1 million square meters luxury condominium in its place. 'Why is that the rich people can live here, but the poor ones who already live can't stay?' asked Altair Guimarães, of the resident's association. This is the third time he has been forcibly removed from a home. This time, he says, he and his

THE UPCOMING mega sporting events and multi-billion dollar businesses, this year's World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games, are drawing many rural migrants from Brazil's poorest regions, as well as neighbouring countries, to the cities in search of work. Slave labour remained largely a rural phenomenon in Brazil, where it occurs on cattle ranches and the sugar cane plantations but now many new victims have become trapped into forced labour. There are widespread abusive labour recruitment practices in Brazil which lead to debt bondage and deprivation of liberty. There are an estimated 18 million victims of forced labour worldwide, including 25,000 to 40,000 in Brazil.

Luiz Machado, national coordinator of the International Labour Organisation's Special Action Programme to Combat Forced Labour said the United Nations is worried about a sharp increase in slave labour ahead of and during the World Cup and the Olympic Games. 'These major events draw workers from around the country, and immigrants, for the construction of stadiums,' he explained. 'Major infrastructure works also have a social impact, in terms of sexual exploitation and even child labour...'

Of more concern to others is the mobilisation of the military, with checkpoints at the entrances to the favelas and patrols on foot and in armoured personnel carriers to maintain 'law and order' and ensure a 'safe and peaceful' festival of football. A new so-called pacification police unit, the UPP, has been created and has already been in action with prolonged gun battles with the many powerful criminal gangs, such as Comando Vermelho (Red Command), who often took on the role of legislative, executive and judiciary lawgivers in the areas where the state has been absent during previous decades. According to a *Financial Times* report (27 March) common crimes such as robberies have risen in 'pacified' slums as the police are largely less feared than the former drug gang leaders.

People are enraged that their lives were being sacrificed for the sake of sport which will enrich the lives of speculators seeking the gentrification of the favelas. 500 families live in Vila

neighbours will fight. And stay put.

People are angered at the billions of reals being borrowed and spent on the World Cup and Olympic Games infrastructures, knowing it will be they, the Brazilian working people, who will have to suffer the consequences. The government is investing huge amounts of money in stadiums while women give birth in hospital corridors and waiting rooms. In January, police opened fire on residents of the Morro São João Mill neighborhood, in New North Zone of Rio de Janeiro, who were protesting a lack of electricity for weeks in their community. The World Cup still remains the priority. The poor are paying a heavy price for money-making international sporting events.

While Brazil was playing a warm-up friendly against Spain, police were firing tear gas at demonstrators not far away. Brazilians are football fanatics so why are they so anti-World Cup? Is it the price tag for the six-week tournament which is expected to be \$11 billion (a very conservative estimate)? Or because at least nine people died in the construction of the country's 12 stadiums, where observers have said corruption and incompetence permitted the contractors to line their pockets? Perhaps it is because the government has relocated more than 15,000 families from favelas across the country. By the time the Olympics arrive, that number could rise to more than 100,000.

Or might it be the fact that police in Rio de Janeiro killed one suspect for every 229 they arrested last year. In the United States, police killed one suspect for every 31,575 they arrested, or that in 2008, police in Rio killed 1,137 people, whereas in the entire United States police killed 371 people. In fact, the murder rate in Rio de Janeiro has declined. But it appears to be offset by the dramatic increase in missing persons. Last year nearly 5,000 people went missing. Many people blame the police.

Enjoy the games, those sporting spectacles that are supposed to appease and placate the masses.

**ALJO**





# Attack Dog? Or Barking Mad?

blooded Old Etonian will have devoted some thought to the best way of Making A Name For Themselves. Epsom and Ewell in the lushly arboreal county of Surrey has been palaeocrystic in its loyalty to the Conservative Party. Between 1978 and 2001 it was represented by Archibald Gavin Hamilton Kt PC who was knighted in 1994 and then eventually made a life peer in 2005 as Lord Hamilton of Epsom, of West Anstey in the County of Devon. At 6 feet 6 inches he was the tallest MP, an early recruit of the Conservative Monday Club and chairman of the 1922 Committee. Among his other junior posts was Parliamentary Private Secretary to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. And oh yes; he now plays bridge for the House of Lords team.

## Grayling

Hamilton's resignation left the Tories of Epsom and Ewell seeking a replacement. Among the hopefuls there was Chris Grayling – if they were prepared to overlook the embarrassing fact that he had once been a member of that chaotic spasm the Social Democratic Party. He had trodden the well-worn path of Cambridge, TV journalism, management consultancy and the obligatory candidacy in some impregnable fortress of the provincial Labour Party. He was chosen as the candidate and in the 2001 election he had a majority some way above 10,000. In the Commons he soon attracted attention with junior jobs in Transport, Work and Pensions and the Home office. Whatever else this experience offered him it was a valuable opportunity to establish a reputation – which the Tories badly needed then – for determined aggression.

That was a time when the Blair governments were persistently vulnerable to hostility from any ambitious predator and Grayling fitted this role well enough to earn himself the title of 'attack dog', undeterred by the fact that he would be subjected to the same treatment if the Tories were to get back into power. In 2005 he attacked Cherie and Tony Blair, and in 2007 Gordon Brown, for breaches of the ministerial code in their foreign travel. And among the most dramatically newsworthy, in 2005: 'I am astonished that Mr. Blunkett has broken the Ministerial Code on yet another occasion. This is getting beyond a joke' – which persuaded Blunkett to resign from a governmental post for the second time in a year. It all went a long way to solidify Grayling's standing as the Tories' attack dog, helping them back to their rightful place in power.

## Benefits

Grayling's appointment after the 2010 election as Minister of State for Employment encouraged him to turn his attention to other targets. For example those hordes of idle, manipulating layabouts who, rather than submit themselves to compliant exploitation, lived by dishonest claims for state benefits and so almost bled the City of

London to extinction.

In 2007, during his time in opposition, Grayling had said that a problem for the next – presumably Tory – government was that the benefits system was causing 'billions of pounds' to be lost to fraudulent claims but in fact most of this was due to departmental errors so that less than £1 billion was in question. In another field there was the award of a lucrative contract to administer some 'Welfare-To-Work' schemes to Grayling's preference the firm Deloitte Ingeus after they had made a donation of nearly £28,000 to Grayling. And there was the matter of his expense claims, in which he spread the cost of extensive improvements in his flat in Pimlico over two years so that he could claim the full amount in total. As a whole these matters, together with many others of similar style, do not support any image of Grayling as a minister conforming to the same style of living and contributing as he seeks to impose on the rest of us.

## Baltimore

In September 2012 Grayling was promoted in a reshuffle to join the Cabinet as Secretary of State for Justice and Lord Chancellor. This change was not universally welcome; in March 2010 he had almost brought about his own disappearance from the gaggle of aspiring promotion prospects by the protests greeting his approval of landlords choosing to discriminate against gay and lesbian couples. In what is known as the Criminal Justice System there were similar reservations for in August 2009 he had upset the police and local councillors when he likened the crime in Moss Side, Manchester to what was depicted in Baltimore by the American TV series *The Wire* as 'urban war'. In fact there was little similarity between the two cities; the police said that gang-related shootings were down by 82 percent and the *Manchester Evening News* reported that there had been no such murders during the previous year – a pretty awful situation but nothing like as bad as Grayling alleged. There was also a distinct, strongly expressed, opposition to his appointment from the lawyers, still smarting from the cuts in legal aid payments, because they interpreted the fact that Grayling was the first Lord Chancellor without any legal qualifications as a message that the law was now 'negotiable'.

## Books

So there could be no surprise that Grayling turned his attention to the prison system and what goes on in it and what is expected of it. His policy was summed up by one of his staff as 'Offenders can't expect something for nothing any more'. And it turned out that 'something' included books mailed to prisoners by their family, which are now banned. One of the objectors to this restriction was Eric Allison, prison correspondent of *The Guardian*, who some years ago was released on licence from a life sentence. Allison ascribes his turning point to the opportunity to read, which separated him from the nearly 50 percent of prisoners who struggle with a reading age of or below that of an 11 year old: 'I suddenly thought where have you been all my life? I just devoured books'. It went on from there, over the years until he came out a changed man.

Can we expect anything as dramatic and impressive from our Lord Chancellor Chris Grayling? The attack dog . . . ? Perhaps just one more thing of note: he is now known among his staff as *Failing Grayling*.

IVAN



Chris Grayling

# Scottish? English? Who cares?

*In the run-up to the referendum in Scotland in September we begin a three-part series exposing the myths surrounding events in Scottish history.*



**'R**eive' is an early English word for 'to rob', from the Northumbrian Scots verb *reifen*, related to the modern English word 'ruffian'. The reivers also added the words 'blackmail' and 'bereaved' to the English language.

During the wars between Scotland and England, the lives and livelihood of the people on the borders would be devastated by the contending armies. Crops were destroyed, homesteads

burnt and the people murdered or dispersed. Those living in places known as Liddesdale, Redesdale and Tynedale were the most affected as, for reasons of geography, the invaders regularly used these routes. Families on either side of the Border had a lot in common regardless of whether they were Scots or English. It is no coincidence that these people, having their crops regularly destroyed and their livestock stolen,

looked for other means of sustaining themselves and their families. They took to reiving.

Royal authority in either kingdom was often weak and there was little loyalty to a feeble or distant monarch. The uncertainty of existence meant that communities or people kindred to each other would seek security through their own strength and improve their existence at the expense of their rivals.

Bishop John Leslie of Ross wrote of the Border Reivers:

'In time of war they were readily reduced to extreme poverty by the almost daily inroads of the enemy, so, on the restoration of peace, they entirely neglect to cultivate their lands, though fertile, from the fear of the fruits of their labour being immediately destroyed by a new war whence it happens they seek their substances by robberies or plunder and rapine (for they are particularly averse to the shedding of blood) *nor do they much concern themselves whether it be from Scots or English that they rob...* They have a persuasion that all property is common by law of nature and is therefore liable to be appropriated by them in their necessity.' (our emphasis)

The Border reivers, nick-named the 'steel bonnets', raided along the border from the late 13th century to the beginning of the 17th century. Their ranks consisted of both Scottish and English families, and they raided the entire border country without regard to nationality. Border families practised customs similar to those of the Highland Gaels and although feudalism existed, loyalty to kin was much more important and this is what distinguished the Borderers from other Lowland Scots. Relationships between the Border clans varied from uneasy alliance to open deadly feud. There being much cross-border migration, families



that were once Scots now identify themselves as English and vice versa.

The reivers were both English and Scottish and raided both sides of the border impartially, so long as the people they raided had no powerful protectors and no connection to their own kin. When fighting as part of larger English or Scottish armies, Borderers were difficult to control as many had relatives on both sides of the border, despite laws forbidding international marriage by punishment of death. They could claim to be of either nationality, describing themselves as Scottish

Mostly feuds were English against English and Scot against Scot. These feuds could last for generations and families could be engaged in several feuds with several other families. The authorities were reluctant to get involved in feuds because it was their thinking that they could stand back and watch troublesome families kill each other and rid the authorities of problems with these families.

The Debatable Lands lay between Scotland and England, extending from the Solway Firth near Carlisle to Langholm in Dumfries and Galloway, the largest population

clans, such as the Armstrongs, who successfully resisted any attempt by the Scottish or English governments to impose their authority and who could alone put 3,000 men in the field. They launched frequent raids on farms and settlements outside the Debatable Lands and the profits enabled them to become major landowners.

In 1530, King James V broke the strength of the Armstrongs by hanging Johnnie Armstrong of Gilnockie and 31 others. In 1551 the Crown officers of England and Wales, in an attempt to clear out the trouble makers, declared that 'All Englishmen and Scottishmen, after this proclamation made, are and shall be free to rob, burn, spoil, slay, murder and destroy all and every such persons, their bodies, buildings, goods and cattle as do remain or shall inhabit upon any part of the said Debatable Land without any redress to be made for the same.'

Upon his accession to the English throne, James VI of Scotland (who became James I of England) moved hard against the reivers, abolishing Border Law and the very term 'Borders' in favour of 'Middle Shires', and dealing out stern justice to reivers. He embarked on the so-called 'Pacification of the Borders'.

James was determined to have a United Kingdom. He proclaimed that 'if any Englishman steal in Scotland or any Scotsman steal in England any goods or cattle which amount to 12 pence, he shall be punished by death.' The most blatant offenders were rounded up and served with what was known as 'Jeddert Justice' - summary execution. Some families abandoned their reiver connections and found favour with the king and joined in the subjugation of the old reiving families to be rewarded with the lands of their former friends and allies. All Borderers were forbidden to carry weapons and fortified tower houses destroyed. Reiving families were dispossessed of their lands, the people scattered or deported, and many families rounded up and banished to Ireland where they partly made up those who became known as the Ulster-Scots. And there lies another tragic tale of blood-soaked nationalism and unionism!

**ALJO**

*Next month: the myths surrounding the Battle of Bannockburn.*



**Above: border Reivers in action. Right: An English herald approaches Scottish soldiers during the Anglo-Scottish wars**

or English at will. At battles such as Ancrum Moor in Scotland in 1545, Borderers changed sides in mid-battle, to curry favour with the likely victors, and at the Battle of Pinkie Cleugh in 1547, an observer (William Patten) noticed that the Scottish and English borderers were talking to each other in the midst of battle, and on being spotted put on a show of fighting. Indeed the Borderers had a much closer allegiance to their family than to their country. Raids were made, not in the name of Scotland or England, but in the name of their family or clan. A Border official, Thomas Musgrave said: 'They are people that will be Scottishe when they will and English at their pleasure.'

When a man was killed his whole family became involved in a feud with the family who had done the killing. Reprisals were not just against the killer's immediate family but against anyone with the same surname.



centre being Canonbie, and which country's sovereignty it lay under was a matter of dispute. Some twelve miles long and three to four miles wide, the boundaries were marked by the rivers Liddel and Esk in the east and the River Sark in the west. For over three hundred years they were effectively controlled by local



# The Euro-Elections in Ireland

In common with all other EU states, European elections took place in Ireland last month. There were also elections to a reformed local government structure. In spite of the interest which the mass media devoted to both these spectacles, it's a close call to decide which poll epitomised most the lack of real and meaningful politics under capitalism.

Socialists make the claim that national parliaments are little more than talking-shops; full of theatrics, posturing and verbosity whose main output are inconsequential debates on the issues of the day. All the while, the fundamental business of capitalism goes inexorably on, irrespective of whatever pronouncements and edicts emanate from those self-important halls. This criticism is even truer of the European Parliament and local councils. For the former, the inability of the European capitalist class to agree on a trans-national system of governance for the Union has rendered the Parliament at Brussels more meaningless than its national counterparts. One obvious manifestation of this in Ireland, as with many other EU countries, is the apathy and consequent low voter turnout that the Euro-elections engender. It is only the second division of politicians who contest these elections; the jibe that it is usually those politicians whose national careers are behind them and who are in search of a comfortable retirement home still rings true.

Most voters, even those with a reasonable interest in political life, would be hard-pressed to name even a couple of their MEPs (apart from the few 'colourful characters' who inevitably are present) and know much less about any accomplishments of the members. Of course this can sometimes work to the politicians' advantage; one Irish MEP in fact has had prolonged absence from the Parliament in Brussels/Strasbourg (due to illness) but given the extremely low profile attached to these positions, this has not been noticed by the electorate and so poses no electoral risk whatsoever in his bid for re-election. Nonetheless competition was quite fierce between the rival candidates. This was accentuated this time

around because there were fewer seats available as a result of the need to accommodate enlargement of the organisation to Eastern Europe whilst not increasing inordinately the number of parliamentarians. There's no doubt that the generous remuneration on offer and relatively light demands of the job are attractive to many career politicians.

## State of play

What is the state of play between the rival political parties? The ruling coalition of Fine Gael and Labour stood on their record in government for the last three years. They came to power in the 2011 general election replacing the absolutely discredited, previous administration consisting

of a Fianna Fail / Green Party coalition. Their main task in that time has been to implement the budget cuts demanded by the troika (EU Commission, ECB and IMF) who came to Ireland's rescue after the financial crash of 2008. They now have a predicament because of Ireland's recent exit from the bailout programme. Prior to that all cuts to social welfare, health, education etc could be blamed on the bungling of the previous government and the strict conditions attached to Ireland's financial aid programme. Now it is more difficult to justify the continuing cuts and the extra taxes on home-owners and new charges on previously free commodities such as water.

*Brussels - sinecure for washed-up politicians?*





## “At some level the electorate know full well the pointlessness of this charade...”

That long-time ‘natural party of government’, Fianna Fail is hamstrung as it is still identified by its gross incompetence in the handling of the economy during the last doomed years of the Celtic Tiger and as they made the initial agreement to the stringent bail-out terms in 2010, they cannot logically oppose its consequences of austerity on the working class.

Sinn Fein was the major winner in terms of tapping into the public disenchantment with the establishment parties; in fact something similar to the ground being staked out by UKIP in Britain although Sinn Fein occupy a different position on the conventional political spectrum. It’s all part of their progress from solely being the political wing of and apologists for the IRA to being a ‘radical’, left-of-centre movement. However even that radicalism is now being dropped as too intimidating to the voting public on the basis that it could hinder the party’s electoral advance. Sinn Fein is now positioning itself as a much more ‘respectable’ party which inevitably means their erstwhile ‘socialistic’ policies are now being discarded and being replaced by a more mainstream platform although some leftist rhetoric is maintained for effect.

The impact on the election outcome of the recent arrest of Gerry Adams was difficult to gauge. On one level it cemented his appeal to hard-line republicans and the fact that he recently spent four days in a British police station being questioned about ‘republican activities’ during the ‘armed struggle’ did him no harm. As against that there is the crime he is associated with and its resonance with the wider public particularly down South. Jean McConville was a woman, a widow, a mother of ten children. Even in 1972, PIRA recognized the damage the claiming of her execution would do to their image and hence her fate of being secretly buried rather than the usual end of those the IRA termed ‘informers’; beaten, shot dead and their bodies dumped along the border. The fact that former close ‘comrades’ have implicated him directly in her murder made the Party nervous.

There was also a clutch of minor groups and independent candidates going forward. The minor groups tend to occupy the left end of the spectrum and broadly indulge in Euro-sceptic rhetoric and promoting ‘grassroots resistance’ while the independents can be impossible to meaningfully classify though are usually inchoate populists and as likely to be right wing as left wing.

### Proliferation of posters

Apart from media coverage, the other unmistakable manifestation of the on-going election campaign was the proliferation of posters on any available lampposts and poles. These were remarkable for their uniformity and bore the imprint of some prior consultation with an advertising agency. More than half of the poster space was taken up by a picture of the candidate, photo-shopped onto a bland background. A shirt and tie is the standard attire for the men, jewellery and make-up for the women. About a third of the poster had the candidate’s name in large letters with the word ‘Vote’ prominently displayed beside it. Interestingly the name of the party that the candidate is representing was quite small: with the demise of major ideological differences between the parties and the weakening of the party system, increasingly elections are morphing into straightforward personality contests.

Generally the posters for the mainstream politicians carried no slogan. Even when one was present it was only distinguished by its vacuous nature; ‘Power to the People’, ‘Strengthening Your Community’, ‘Working For You’ etc. etc. As to Sinn Fein, twenty or more years ago their candidates’ pictures on their posters had the appearance of men still in or recently released from prison (which indeed quite a number were). Now they are more likely to be young, presentable and female designed to obscure any association with balaclavas, car-bombs and Armalites.

The impact of money on the election process was easy to discern from the appearance of the posters. Those of the independent candidates and fringe parties were smaller, more likely to be mono-chrome rather

than glossy colour and much less ‘professional’ in appearance. One redeeming feature of them is that at least these posters had some quasi-political slogan on them indicating an attempt to promulgate a message rather than relying on personality. In fact the overall nature of the posters can be seen as a succinct metaphor for the state of politics now. Any real engagement by the electorate with the process is being diminished with time which means the parties themselves realise it is pointless devoting time and space to programmes or manifestos. Image and spin is much more important to success which entails the indiscriminate harvesting of votes and is unconcerned with any understanding or agreement with policies.

### No difference

It’s a pity that the opportunity that elections present, in terms of a slightly higher interest by the general public in politics, is completely wasted. The fact that people don’t engage is probably because they realise, either consciously or subconsciously, that the result of these elections makes no difference to their lives. If you have a house and job, you’ll probably continue to have both after this election. If you’re unemployed, you may or may not have a better chance of picking up a job. If you’re a billionaire, you’ll almost certainly remain very wealthy whoever wins on election day. There is an unstated realism at play; at some level the electorate know full well the pointlessness of this charade in terms of real impact on their lives.

When we contest elections we don’t engage in this type of smooth and glib electioneering. We do not involve ourselves in the hiring of image consultants and spin-doctors, the cynical analysis of focus group responses to discern where lies the greatest electoral advantage or the cultivation of the media to project some image. We openly state that our aim is the replacement of the current basis of society (capitalism and production for profit by an alternative society (socialism and production to meet people’s needs) and we work towards this aim.

**KEVIN CRONIN**

# Bacon and Steam Trains: the Serbian Pork War and the Berlin-Baghdad Railway

*As the centenary commemorations of the First World War start to build up, we look at some of the causes of the conflict.*

**T**he rivalry between Austria-Hungary and Tsarist Russia for territories and influence in the Balkan region was a fundamental cause of the First World War. The rivalry between the Hapsburg and the Romanov dynasties manifested itself in the economic rivalry between the Austrian-Hungarian Empire and the landlocked Kingdom of Serbia, and this rivalry was prosaically expressed in a customs war about pork. Between 1906-09 the huge Austrian-Hungarian Empire imposed a customs blockade on the importation of Serbian pigs.

The friendly relations between the German Reich and the Ottoman Empire were seen as a threat by both Tsarist Russia and the British Empire. Russia feared losing

mainly livestock in the form of pigs. This economic arrangement with Austria-Hungary guaranteed trade and revenue for the Kingdom of Serbia but it also impeded Serbia's industrial growth. In 1903 the Austrian-Serb commercial treaty was expiring, and negotiations were foundering because Serbia wanted to reduce its economic dependence on Austria-Hungary. In order to evade the economic control of Austria-Hungary, Serbia started to build economic links with other countries such as Bulgaria and France.

## Serbian pork

In January 1904 Serbia arranged a loan through a French businessman who would purchase 150,000 Serbian pigs per year, and then

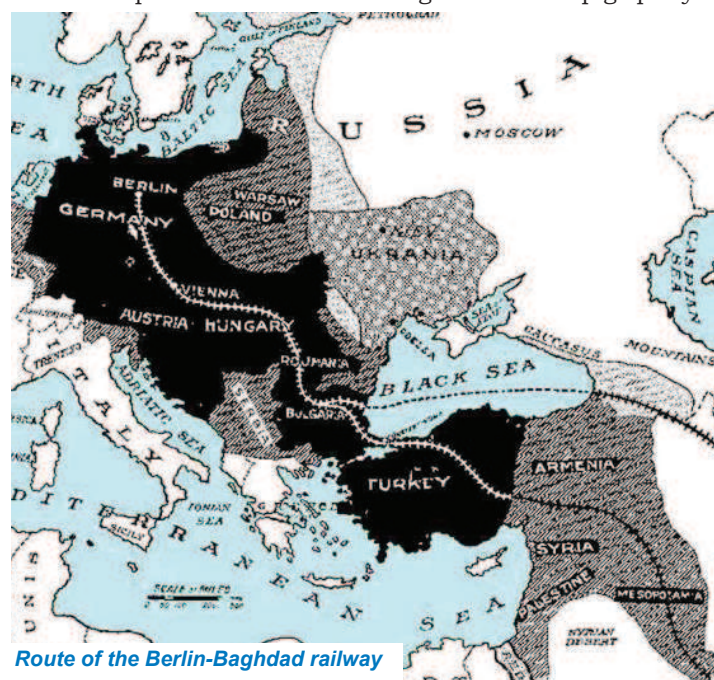
placed a large artillery order with Schneider, a French munitions firm. Previously, Serbia purchased munitions from the Skoda factories in Bohemia in the Austrian-Hungarian Empire.

In April 1904 Serbia entered into secret commercial negotiations with Bulgaria which became public in June 1905, and the

the end of exporting Serbian pigs to the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, and the beginning of what became known as the Serbian Pork War.

Initially the end of pig exports to the Austrian-Hungarian Empire was a shock to the Serbian economy. Serbia framed the issue of its pigs in terms of Serbian nationalism and Balkan independence from the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. The trade embargo forced Serbia to find alternative export markets. French investment was sought to build new packing plants for international trade, materials were ordered from Germany, construction projects were financed with capital from France, and trade agreements were signed with Romania, France, Russia, Switzerland, Sweden, Italy, Belgium, Egypt, Greece, Turkey, and Germany. Serbia also put pressure on the Austria-Hungary protectorate of Bosnia-Herzegovina to allow a rail link so it could have an economic outlet on the Adriatic Sea. Serbia also made an arrangement with the Ottoman Empire to export livestock from the port of Salonica on the Aegean Sea, and received aid for the construction of processing plants, modern slaughterhouses and canning factories for livestock. The net economic result for Serbia was that its foreign trade surpassed what it had been before the embargo and its agricultural industry was thoroughly modernised, pig farming was vertically integrated into a single operation.

Serbia was also interested in expanding its territory to include Bosnia-Herzegovina where many ethnic Serbs lived. Austria-Hungary, fearing greater Serbian economic power, formally annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina to their empire in October 1908 which angered Russia and Serbia but they were unable to take action because they received no support from Britain or France. The annexation had to be accepted by Russia and Serbia in March 1909. Austria-Hungary also planned to build a railway line to the Aegean Sea through Austrian occupied former Ottoman territory



influence in the Balkans (its close ally was Serbia), and German control of the Dardanelles, while the British felt threatened by German access to the Middle East which would affect the Suez Canal, the oil rich Persian Gulf and the vital route to India. These fears for Russia and Britain were manifested in the building of the Berlin to Baghdad Railway.

In 1903 90 percent of Serbia's foreign trade was with the Austrian-Hungarian Empire which was

Serbian-Bulgarian Customs Union became effective in March 1906. Trade negotiations between Serbia and Austria-Hungary came to an end. Tariff-laden Austrian goods became unsellable in Serbia.

In retaliation, Austria-Hungary closed its borders to all trade with Serbia with effect from 1 March 1906. The Imperial authorities claimed there was an outbreak of disease in Serbian pigs which threatened to infect Austrian livestock. This meant



which would by-pass Serbia and also create a commercial barrier between Serbia and the Adriatic Sea. The annexation coupled with pork embargo only fanned the flames of Serbian nationalism at home in Serbia and amongst Bosnian Serbs. In fact it was a Bosnian Serb who assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo which precipitated the First World War.

### German ultimatum

In 1909 the economic war over pigs between Austria-Hungary and Serbia came to an end when tensions over Bosnia-Herzegovina between Austria-Hungary and Russia reached such a level that international war was a possibility. Germany intervened and issued an ultimatum demanding the ending of Russian aid to Serbia. Trade was normalised between Austria-Hungary and Serbia but increased Serbian nationalism was the result of Austria-Hungary's economic war.

The major international issue of the nineteenth century was the 'Eastern Question' or what to do with the 'sick old man of Europe' which was the decaying Ottoman Empire on the European mainland. By the turn of the twentieth century the Ottoman Empire had little territory left in Europe but it still held vast swathes of territory in Asia Minor, the Levant, Palestine, Mesopotamia and the Arabian peninsula which was all resource-rich with oil, chrome, antimony, lead and zinc, and with effective irrigation had a thriving agricultural industry. What was needed was a railway transportation system to move minerals and resources through the Ottoman Empire to link up with industrialised Europe.

The 'Orient Express' reached Istanbul in 1889, and in 1892 the railway was built from Istanbul to Ankara in Asia Minor by a syndicate of German businesses. The German Reich and the Porte (Ottoman Empire) were on friendly terms, and both opposed to Russian attempts to control the Dardanelles and yielding influence in the Balkans. The proposed 'Berlin to Baghdad' railway line would link Germany to the oilfields in the Persian Gulf, in striking distance of British oilfields in Persia, Russian oilfields in the Caucasus, close to British India, and a railway from Baghdad to Basra would also be a connection to Germany's African colonies in East and South West Africa and thereby avoid the British-controlled Suez Canal.

In 1903 the Deutsche Bank was awarded the concession to build the railway line from Konya in Anatolia through the Levant (Syria), Mesopotamia (Iraq) to Baghdad and thence to the Persian Gulf at Basra. By 1915 the railway line was 300 miles short of completion. The line was eventually completed in 1940. German advice and support was involved in the building of the Hejaz railway from 1900-08 which linked Damascus through Palestine to Medina in the Arabian peninsula. This line connected with the Berlin to Baghdad railway but was principally for the Ottoman Empire to strengthen its control over the desert tribes of the Arabian peninsula.

### Threats to the Empire

The main issue for the British Empire was the economic threat posed by Germany in the competition for oil and trade by the existence of the Berlin to Baghdad railway. The British believed that the Persian Gulf with its oil resources and strategic importance was 'their' sphere of economic and political influence; the British Residency of the Persian Gulf was a diplomatic posting from 1763 to 1971.



**Bosnian Serb Gavrilo Princip is arrested after the assassin of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo**

The British policy in regard to Kuwait is testament to British attempts to exclude Germany from the Persian Gulf. In 1899 Kuwait signed a treaty with Britain that gave the British control over Kuwait's foreign policy in exchange for British protection and an annual subsidy. The treaty was prompted by British fears about the proposed Berlin to Baghdad railway which with a link to Basra would lead to an expansion of German economic influence in the Persian Gulf. The creation of the artificial state of Kuwait at the head of the Gulf blocks access from Basra

to the Gulf. In 1913 Britain signed a convention with the Porte that the Emir of Kuwait was diplomatically recognised by both the Ottoman and British Empires as the ruler of the autonomous city of Kuwait and hinterlands. With the start of the First World War and the Ottoman Empire in alliance with Germany, the British invalidated the convention and declared Kuwait an independent principality under the protection of the British Empire.

In 1901 British capitalists had negotiated a concession to explore for oil in Persia and in 1908 an oilfield was discovered which led to the formation of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) which would later become BP. Production of Persian oil products started at the Abadan refinery in 1913, and in the same year APOC was awarded a contract with the British government, in the shape of the First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill, as part of a three year modernisation programme for the Royal Navy to convert from using coal to oil. The British government took a controlling share in APOC. Earlier in 1912 APOC had taken a 50 percent share in the new Turkish Petroleum

Company to explore and develop oil resources in Mesopotamia (Iraq) which would eventually bear fruit with the discovery of a massive oilfield in 1927.

It is clear British economic interests in the region were vital and the threat posed by Germany and its Berlin to Baghdad/Basra railway was very real. The British war aim in the First World War was to restrict German access to Mesopotamia and its oil, and strategic exclusion from rail access to the Persian Gulf was to be enforced

by British military presence, and afterwards by removal of German ownership of the railway. The British Empire fully engaged in a war against the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East, capturing Basra in 1914, defending the Suez Canal, supporting the Arab Revolt (Colonel T.E. Lawrence) 1916-18, capturing Baghdad and Jerusalem in 1917, and Damascus and Aleppo in the Levant (Syria) in 1918. The armistice of 30 October 1918 ended six hundred years of Ottoman rule in the Middle East and left the British and

**Continued page 21**

# GOLD BORES

**T**he number of writers that are currently churning out books about 'debt-enslavement' and advocating currency-crank ideas seems to be rising faster than the price of the average derivative. One particular group of theorists are the 'gold bugs' who advocate gold as a safe-haven investment and tend to argue that only a gold-backed currency and international trading system is likely to stabilise the global market economy. Some hark back to the days when paper currency was 'as good as gold' and could be converted into the precious metal at a fixed rate.

Business analyst Kelly Mitchell, author of *Gold Wars: The Battle for the Global Economy* (Clarity Press, 2013) seems to be part of this group. In fairness, to those who are interested, there is a lot of fascinating (if sometimes technical) detail in his book about the operation of the precious metals markets in gold and silver. Part of Mitchell's case is that the powers-that-be are frightened that physical gold and silver will emerge as real money again now that the currency in use across the world is fiat (token) money not backed by anything of real value like precious metals. He contends that economies using fiat money are prone to asset price bubbles stimulated by credit expansion from the central banks and wider banking system.

Mitchell repeats some of the myths about the power of the banks to create massive multiples of credit out of nothing that have been resurgent in recent years, and also trots out some of the highly questionable quotes often used to justify these views (see *Socialist Standard* October 2012 on these). He claims the financial crisis has now laid bare the mountains of debt and

worthless paper being pumped out by banks and governments and that in order to stop a flight towards precious metals banks and governments have been manipulating the gold price downwards for years. This is to make it look less attractive and credible as an alternative to paper money and credit.

## Market manipulation

It is certainly true that there appears to have been short-term market manipulation taking place periodically in the gold and silver markets, and this is where Mitchell clearly has accumulated much knowledge and evidence. Indeed, although Mitchell doesn't describe it in detail here, the way the gold price for physical bullion is fixed in London each day – long the centre of the world gold market – is itself a gift to the conspiracy theorists. The five leading members of the London Bullion Market Association meet at 10.30am and 3pm each day to 'fix' in their words, the international 'spot' gold price. Until recent years this used to be done at the offices of NM Rothschild in the City of London (enough, of itself, to get the conspiracy theorists' pulses racing) though these days it is done by Barclays, HSBC, Deutsche Bank, the Bank of Nova Scotia, and Société Générale. Private tele-conferences between these banks communicate information about demand and supply for physical gold until an average price emerges. When

representatives of the five banks concerned are happy with the price, they each lower a miniature Union Jack flag on their desks – when all five flags are down the price is then fixed and relayed to other markets (including those for gold futures, options, etc).

Naturally, it is in this sort of environment that conspiracy theories flourish and there are a fair few in this book concerning precious metals and the power struggles around them. These include a bizarre historical one linking the JFK assassination with an apparent attempt by Kennedy to get the US Treasury to issue currency backed by precious metal (in that particular case, silver). A more plausible contemporary theory is that because there are now mountains of paper derivatives of gold, including Exchange Traded-Funds which are investments intended to mimic fluctuations in the gold price, there may not be appropriate levels of physical gold held by banks to satisfy the potential claims on it. In other words, investment banks have been busy creating financial products to sell derived from gold but which are not really backed by gold. Indeed, Mitchell and others have claimed that it is likely that the same gold is used several times over to 'back' derivatives – and that if the owners of these financial products demanded physical gold bullion in return for their paper certificates there would be nowhere near enough gold held in the vaults of the major banks and central banks

to satisfy the demand, leading to financial panic.

## Fort Knox

Compounding this is the mystery about how much gold banks actually have in their vaults, and about the quality of this gold. In 2009, the Chinese government



**Fort Knox: what's in your wallet?**



received a shipment of gold from the US only to find that when the bullion bars were drilled they were partly tungsten, and it is thought that an increasing proportion of gold held in bank vaults is adulterated and of poor quality. Most major governments are very reluctant to have the gold held in their vaults audited for volume and quality – the US government has resisted for years an audit of the 4,600 tons of bullion it claims is held in Fort Knox.

What is for certain – and partly accounts for the title of Mitchell's book – is that a significant shift has been taking place in recent years in the ownership of gold bullion. China and Russia have been significant buyers and so have some Middle Eastern states. This in turn seems to be part of a concerted attempt to undermine the US dollar and the American political and economic hegemony underpinning it, by establishing alternative trading mechanisms to the US currency. An example is that oil has been priced and traded in dollars for decades (the so-called 'petro-dollar'), but many states are now showing signs of moving away from this system, including both Russia and China who have recently signed a deal to trade oil in the Chinese Yuan. This is indicative of the US losing its place as the dominant global capitalist power as happened to Britain after the end of the First World War. The dollar is seen as a far weaker currency than it has been in living memory and Mitchell claims that the lack of real gold backing it has been part of the cause.

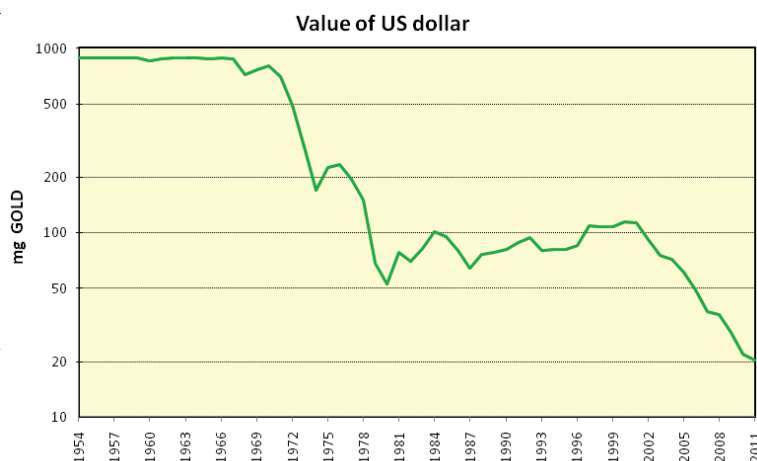
Interesting though it is, there are nevertheless a number of problems with this book. One is that it is not especially well written and many of the charts and figures included are not properly explained or even reproduced in an intelligible way. The analytical faults, however, are even more serious. Like many in this field, Mitchell is prone to exaggeration and overlooks evidence which contradicts his case. For instance, if suppression of the gold price is part of a concerted attempt by major central banks and private banks to prevent gold emerging as an alternative to fiat currency as a representative of wealth, this is hardly consistent with the 800 percent increase in the price of gold seen in recent years, even if it is down on the highs it achieved in

## "the way the gold price is fixed is a gift to the conspiracy theorists"

the immediate wake of the financial crisis.

### Gold standard

More seriously still, Mitchell holds totally untenable views about monetary and trading systems based on gold (both in terms of national currencies and earlier international trading systems like the Gold Standard). Referring to the US Federal Reserve, he says 'Since the Fed's inception, the dollar has declined over 95%, the economy has seen a series of booms, busts, crashes, asset bubbles, and bank runs, that almost never happened under a gold standard, and unemployment has been far greater' (p.110-111). But apart from the decline in the value of the dollar caused by inflation, none of this is true.



The idea that slumps, asset bubbles and bank runs didn't happen under the Gold Standard of international trading payments and when currencies like the pound sterling and the dollar were convertible into gold on demand, is frankly ludicrous. They actually happened on a regular basis including the major 1907 financial crisis in the US when JP Morgan organised a bail-out of several major US banks that were about to fail, and of course the 1929 Wall Street crash and subsequent Great Depression. As well as banking crises and equity bubbles and crashes, there were also asset price bubbles in housing, land, commodities and a range of other assets. Asset bubbles, runs on banks and financial panics were commonplace throughout the period,

and in all major countries. For example, the UK has experienced 12 banking crises since 1800, with only four of these since it came off the Gold Standard, while in the US the figures are 13 and two respectively (see *This Time is Different: Eight Centuries of Financial Folly* by Reinhart and Rogoff).

Mitchell has failed to understand that the expansion and contraction of the credit system that he is fixated on, and its attendant asset bubbles, is a reflection of the underlying trade cycle of the market economy and is not its cause. This instead is the drive by firms to sell commodities at a profit as if the demand for them is unlimited, leading to over-expansion of the booming sectors of the economy. This overproduction leads to cut-backs, hoarding and lay-offs and the monetary and credit systems are what transmits these effects throughout the economy more widely. An example was the over-expansion of the property sector in relation to paying demand in the US, UK, Spain and other countries which triggered the most recent financial crisis when credit lines and derivatives related to this turned sour. And as Marx

pointed out in *Capital* in relation to the many crises that have taken place when monetary systems were based on gold, convertibility was no solution but just another means for transmitting financial chaos:

'[A]s soon as credit is shaken, and this is a regular and necessary phase in the cycle of modern industry, all real wealth is supposed to be actually and suddenly

transformed into money, into gold and silver – a crazy demand, but one that necessarily grows out of the system itself. And the gold and silver that is supposed to satisfy these immense claims amounts in all to a few millions in the vaults of the bank . . . with the development of the credit system, capitalist production constantly strives to overcome this metallic barrier, which is both a material and an imaginary barrier to wealth and its movement, while time and again breaking its head on it' (Volume 3, p.708).

Indeed, whether the market economy operates with a monetary system tied to gold or not is effectively irrelevant so far as its underlying trade cycle is concerned as this cycle occurs irrespective of the precise monetary conditions,

which influence the surface froth and bubble but little else. It therefore follows that tinkering with the monetary system is illusory as a solution to this problem of periodic booms, crises and slumps. In fact, it is partly because the international Gold Standard and also convertibility of notes did not solve these very problems (and in the minds of many economists even exacerbated them) that they were abandoned.

The only change of significance since token money (paper notes, etc) has not been convertible any more into gold at a fixed price has been that this has allowed a massive expansion of the note issue to take place. Over time, gold as a real store of wealth and a product of human labour became the means by which all other commodities and services produced by labour could be measured – in this sense it was ‘real money’. If paper tokens were introduced to circulate on behalf of gold, representing it in fixed quantities, these paper tokens acted as money (as ‘good as gold’) and so were representative of the social wealth embodied in commodities more generally in the economy.

But when convertibility was suspended this allowed paper money to be issued far in excess of the amount of gold that was representative of the wealth being produced by society – and this phenomenon has been the source of the massive currency inflation that has occurred across the world market economy since the 1930s, massively eroding the purchasing power of the dollar, pound and other currencies. It means notes and coins in circulation are no longer tied in any way to levels of production and trade in the economy. In this respect, any move to tie paper money back to gold would in all likelihood halt inflation – but it would do nothing whatsoever to halt the market economy’s periodic crises and slumps, like the recent one, that have caused so much misery across the world. Only the abolition of prices, credit and money itself can do that, enabling social regulation of production and free access to wealth. In such circumstances, gold will no longer be stored in bank vaults (as these will not exist) and can instead be used productively and creatively rather than as an object of financial speculation and power-broking. And that situation will represent a golden opportunity for us all.

**DAP**

## OBITUARY: SYD WILCOX

Syd, a long-standing member, died in April. He was born in Pimlico in west central London in 1925 and joined the old Paddington branch in December 1943 while still a teenager. After the war (in which he was a conscientious objector) he was active in the Fulham branch. Latterly he was a member and regular attendee of West London branch and had only just been re-elected as one of the Party’s trustees. He had worked in various jobs, including as a professional jazz musician, but ended running a successful antiques business in Fulham. When the ‘Ban the Bomb’ movement started in 1958 with the first Aldermaston March Syd took a minority position within the Party. While most members criticised CND for implicitly supporting ‘conventional’ weapons of war, Syd saw banning nuclear weapons as a step (of sorts) in the right direction. He was also moved by the plight of the Palestinians at the hands of the Israeli state. A staunch socialist to the end, it was Syd who came up with ‘everything free’ as a definition of socialism in as few words as possible. We extend our condolences to his family.



## The recession that roared

‘IT’S OFFICIAL: the Great Recession has ended. Growth set to match record peak of 2008’ was the front page headline in the *Times* of 9 May, anticipating the publication of figures which would show that in April GDP had reached the same level as in March 2008. This, after six years: ‘The British economy shrank 7.2 per cent in the 15 months from April 2008, before suffering the slowest on record’.

This was always going to happen sooner or later but the terminology is interesting. ‘Recession’ was a word introduced by economists in the 1950s and 60s to describe the small, short-lived reductions in production which occurred during the long post-war boom. It was meant to suggest that ‘depressions’ as larger, longer-lasting reductions had become a thing of the past. In this sense a ‘great’ recession should be an oxymoron, but bourgeois economists still cannot bring themselves to use the D-word.

The course of capitalist production is upward but in cycles: a boom ending in a ‘crisis’, followed by a ‘slump’, followed by a recovery, followed by another boom and so on. There is no such thing as a permanent boom as boom conditions inevitably lead to overproduction in one key industry in relation to its market and to this having a knock-on effect on the rest of the economy.

Equally, there is no such thing as a permanent slump. That’s because what happens during a slump (clearance of stocks, devaluation of capital, falling real wages, lower interest rates) creates the conditions for a restoration of profitability and so, in the profit-driven economy that capitalism is, for a recovery, however long this might take.

That is why, throughout the depression, we were always careful not to say that capitalist production would not be able to recover; in other words, that the capitalist economy had broken down and/or entered a period of permanent stagnation. Others were not so careful. A case in point being the Trotskyist group around the paper *Socialist Appeal* whose editor, Adam Booth, wrote in its 26 November 2013 issue an article entitled ‘The permanent slump – an organic crisis of capitalism’. This, he claimed, would have happened thirty years ago had workers not been lent money to buy things. He went on:

‘The use of credit to artificially maintain demand and avoid a crisis is a symptom of the contradictions of capitalism itself: primarily the contradiction of overproduction, due to the nature of capitalism as a system whereby production is in private hands and is only for profit, which means that – since profit is nothing but the unpaid labour of the working class – the working class (as a whole) can never afford to buy back (with wages alone) all that they produce. The current crisis is a reflection of this contradiction unravelling itself on a global scale. All the chickens have come home to roost for the capitalists, and now they – and society as a whole – are faced with an organic crisis of capitalism and a new normality.’

The fallacy here is that the market for goods under capitalism is confined to what workers can buy. But what workers can’t buy, capitalists can, not necessarily or even primarily consumer goods but the elements of production (raw materials, machinery, energy, factories, etc); in a word, investment.

The boom/slump cycle is in fact a reflection of the fluctuations in what capitalist firms chose to invest in the light of the prospects for making a profit.





## **Ghosts by Henrik Ibsen**

DIRECTOR STEPHEN Unwin's final production at the Rose Theatre in Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey was *Ghosts* by Henrik Ibsen. *Ghosts* was written in Danish in 1881, the Danish title *Gengangere* translates as 'revenants: the ones who return.'

Ibsen's play concerns the unearthing of family secrets, confronting the unhappy spectres of the past which Ibsen described as 'a family story as sad and grey as this rainy day.' Mrs Alving (Kelly Hunter) says, 'It's not just what we inherit from our mothers and fathers that haunts us. It's all kinds of old defunct theories, all sorts of old defunct beliefs.' And of course Marx identified that 'the tradition of all dead generations weighs like an Alp on the brains of the living.'

Ibsen's theme is 'how to be true to yourself', personal authenticity, which is constrained by 'the meanness and deliberate hypocrisy of our public life and society.' *Ghosts* is an attack on the hypocrisy in the *moyenne* (middle) bourgeoisie. Mrs Alving is reading books but her spiritual and business adviser, the Lutheran Pastor Manders is not impressed with 'these books, that sort of thing.' We can only guess that they could be works by Marx, Darwin or Nietzsche. Manders represents Protestant, capitalist ethics, the hypocrisy, narrow-mindedness, conventional values, conservative attitudes of petty bourgeois gentility. Manders proclaims 'to pursue happiness in this world is to be governed by the spirit of rebellion. What right do we have to happiness? No, we must do our duty.' It is not surprising that Nietzsche revolted against this upbringing by his Lutheran Pastor father.

Mrs Alving's artist son Oswald (Mark Quarterley) returns from the bohemian life in Paris, defends free love, the 'joy of life' as opposed to the 'vale of tears' of Christian ideology. He represents the 'élan vital', the 'life force' of Bergson's philosophy.

Ibsen was concerned how 'women of the modern age were mistreated as daughters, as sisters, as wives', and Marx felt that with man and woman 'it is possible to judge from this relationship the entire level of development of mankind.'

## **Harris Art Gallery, Preston**

PRESTON IN Lancashire is one of the birthplaces of the industrial revolution and modern capitalist society. Two major pieces of art in the Preston

Harris Art Gallery are *Sir Richard Arkwright* (1932), a bronze bust by William Norris Smith, commissioned for the bicentenary of Arkwright's birth by the Corporation of Preston, and the painting *Portrait of Richard Arkwright* (1783-85) by Joseph Wright of Derby. Arkwright invented the water frame, a water-powered machine for spinning cotton into strong thread in Preston in 1768. RS Fitton wrote that Arkwright was 'the founder of the Factory System, he was the creator of a new industrial society that transformed England from a nearly self-sufficient country with an economy based on agriculture and domestic manufacture, into the workshop of the world.' The first cotton mill

was opened in Preston in 1777 and by 1857 there were seventy five textile factories in the town.

A few hundred yards from the Harris Gallery, on Lune Street outside the former Corn Exchange are the Preston Workers Memorial stone statues, a permanent memorial to the killing of striking cotton workers. It was unveiled in Guild Year on 13 August 1992, the 150th anniversary of the shooting. The memorial was designed and produced by the British artist and sculptor Gordon Young, inspired by Goya's painting *The Third of May 1808* picturing Spanish civilians being executed by Napoleonic troops. It was commissioned by Preston Trades Union Council, and supported by Preston Labour History Group, Preston Borough Council, Lancashire County Council and the then Lancashire Polytechnic.

The strike of Saturday 13 August 1842 was part of the 1842 General Strike, a Chartist-led action in order to secure a fair day's pay for a fair day's toil. In Preston several thousand textile workers went on strike with the result that four workers were shot dead by the military on Lune Street. The Chartist newspaper *The Northern Star* of 20 August 1842 wrote 'the Mayor (Mill owner Samuel Horrocks) ought to be tried for wilful murder.' Later on 10 September 1842 Chartist leader and Preston hand-loom

weaver Richard Marsden wrote in *The Northern Star* 'the humiliated town of Preston, where the well-known Peter-loo tragedy hath just been re-enacted.'

The class struggle continued in Preston as this article by Marx from the *New York Daily Tribune* of 1 August 1854 demonstrates: "The eyes of the working classes are now fully opened: they begin to cry: "Our St. Petersburg is at Preston!"' Indeed, the last eight months have seen a strange spectacle in the town; a standing army of 14,000 men and women subsidized by the trades unions and workshops of all parts of the United Kingdom, to fight out a grand social battle for mastery with the capitalists, and the capitalists of Preston, on their side, held up by the capitalists of Lancashire.'

**STEVE CLAYTON**



*Richard Arkwright, by Joseph Wright, 1785*

# Capitalism kills again: another mining disaster

IT IS only a little over a year since the Rana Plaza garment factory collapse in Bangladesh killed over 1,000 workers. In May this year there was an explosion at a mine near Izmir in Turkey where the death toll was 301 miners killed. It is believed a power distribution unit exploded in the mine which blew power supplies to lifts and conveyors, and started a fire. Most of the dead miners were killed by carbon monoxide poisoning. Nearly 800 miners had been in the pit at the time of the explosion due to a shift change.

It is Turkey's worst mining accident, worse than the 1992 gas explosion that killed 263 workers near the Black Sea port of Zonguldak. Mining accidents are common in Turkey because of poor health and safety conditions. The



Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan exhibited the contempt of the capitalist class for the working class when he said that 'these accidents were part of coal mining' and cited 19th-century incidents in Britain as examples.

A miners' union leader Tayfun Görgün said that mining accidents would increase due to privatisations, the increasing employment of subcontractors and a lack of strong unions, all of which led to massive pressure on workers to produce as much as possible for as little cost as possible. A goldminer who has joined the rescue operation said that work safety and production pressure was a big problem in Turkey: 'It's all about how much you can get out in one day. Work safety just stays behind with such an attitude.' Another worker confirmed this by saying 'Production pressure has massively increased, it's all about the output. If all they worry about is how fast the lines run and how much coal they can bring up and how much profit to make, the people who do

this work become unimportant. And what happens to them becomes unimportant' (*Guardian* 14 May). Murat Ali, a paramedic with the Izmir fire department wore a sticker on his uniform which read 'Not an accident, but murder.'

The disaster has triggered protests across Turkey, and the Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions backed a one day general strike. A joint statement from Turkey's four main labour unions said: 'Hundreds of our worker brothers in Soma have been left to die from the very start by being forced to work in brutal production processes in order to achieve maximum profits. We call on the working class, labourers and friends of labourers to stand up for our brothers in Soma.'

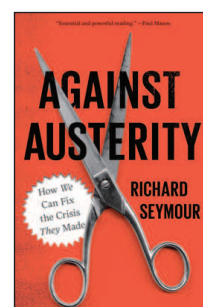
The authoritarian Turkish state responded in its usual way with water cannon, tear gas, and truncheons. Security forces deployed tear gas and water cannon against around 20,000 protesters in İzmir. Kani Beko, general secretary of the Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions of Turkey, was injured in İzmir after police 'intervened.' In Istanbul the streets became heavy with tear gas, the police and water cannon trucks chased protesters, and protesters carried a banner which read 'It's not an accident, it's murder.' In Soma protesters chanted 'Soma's coal will burn the government' and 'Tayyip the murderer.'

Gulizar Donmez, the daughter and wife of Soma miners said 'the wives of the miners kiss their husbands in the morning. When they come back, even if they are five minutes late, everyone starts calling. You never know what is going to happen' (*Guardian* 15 May). Every day throughout the world members of the working class are being killed because of the global economic system that we live in. Capitalism is injurious to the health of the working class, it kills the working class of this world in its pursuit of profit through commodity production. The working class in Turkey and in the whole world need to transform human society into a socialist world where production would be for human needs and not for profit.

**STEVE CLAYTON**

## Book Review

***Against Austerity. How We Can Fix the Crisis They Caused.* By Richard Seymour. Pluto Press. 208 pages. £11.50**



Judging by this book, Richard Seymour, journalist and a leading instigator of a revolt within the SWP a couple of years ago, must have been itching to leave them anyway. He sees

the way forward as building a party in Britain similar to Syriza in Greece which is a conglomeration of various leftwing and reformist groups, similar to what Left Unity aspires to be. Seymour is in fact now an LU member.

Despite the subtitle, he does not set out an alternative economic strategy to austerity but is more concerned with austerity as an ideology, examining how the ruling class has got people to accept it as a necessity. He sees this as something more than simple propaganda, saying that it goes deeper than this and reflects people's experience of everyday life that leads them to view what is possible and what isn't.

He expresses this in Gramsci's terms, but it can be put more simply by saying that as long as most people see no alternative to capitalism (as unfortunately they don't) then they are going to be able to be convinced that there is no alternative to austerity under capitalism in an economic downturn (as there isn't).

Seymour does make a good point against those ideologists of Occupy he calls "anarcho-reformists" and other anti-parliamentarists when he writes:

'The fact that the materiality of the state imposes certain limits, that it is heavily pre-structured in favour of the already dominant classes, that it is *selective* in favour of strategies that benefit the capitalist class, does not mean that one can abandon it as a site of contestation.'

Unfortunately, he has in mind a reformist use of parliament, but the same point applies to the propagandist and revolutionary use we envisage.

**ALB**

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## The Selfish Giant



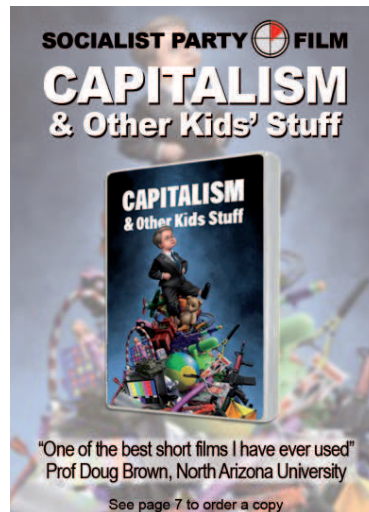
*The Selfish Giant* directed by Clio Barnard is a poetic social-realist film, unsentimental, politically angry in the tradition of Ken Loach's *Kes*. Barnard's aim was 'to make a film in the realist tradition of fables about children' like De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*, Truffaut's *Les quatre cents coups*, and Samira Makhmalbaf's *The Apple*. She has created a damning portrait of capitalist society where a ADD-afflicted teen called Arbor (Conner Chapman) and his best friend Swiftly (Shaun Thomas) engage in 'scrapping': collecting scrap metal or the detritus of capitalism with a horse and cart in the post-industrial landscape of Bradford with its cooling towers and electricity pylons.

It is inspired by the Oscar Wilde story *The Selfish Giant* whose message is that private property is evil; a permanent winter descends caused by his determination to stop children playing in the grounds of his castle. Barnard uses the metaphor for the deleterious effect

on communities when society as a whole fails children. Wilde himself wrote in *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*: 'With the abolition of private property, then, we shall have true, beautiful, healthy Individualism. Nobody will waste his life in accumulating things, and the symbols for things. One will live.'

Barnard said 'The selfish giant of my film is a selfish ideology. I liked Glenda Jackson's speech in the House of Commons after the death of Thatcher when she said that under Thatcher selfishness and greed had become virtues. The film is about what got lost.' *The Selfish Giant* is about capitalism and consumerism fuelling greed, selfishness as an ideology, children marginalised and the general lack of concern about society in capitalism.

**SPC**



from page 15

French in charge of the region.

A book called *The War and the Baghdad Railway: The Story of Asia Minor and its relation to the present conflict* by Morris Jastrow was published in 1917. Jastrow wrote that 'Baghdad and the Persian Gulf in the hands of Germany would be a 42-centimetre gun pointed at India.' The contemporary history book Pollard's *Short History of the Great War* (1919) notes the importance of the Berlin to Baghdad railway: 'on the 26 October 1918 Aleppo fell, and on 28 October we reached Muslimeh, that junction on the Baghdad railway on which longing eyes had been cast as the nodal point in the conflict of German and other ambitions in the East.'

The 1919 Versailles Peace Treaty accomplished everything that the British Empire wanted. Germany lost its colonies in Africa which became mandates of the British Empire, Germany lost the ownership of the Berlin to Baghdad railway, the Ottoman Empire was broken up and Britain received as mandates Mesopotamia and Palestine, and economic influence in Persia and the Gulf continued. But as we said in this magazine after the war, further wars were inevitable within this capitalist set-up:

'While competition between capitalist groups for routes, markets, and control of raw material exists, the cause of war remains' (*Socialist Standard* August 1919).

**STEVE CLAYTON**



## Ballads And Beards

ACROSS EUROPE, spangly strapless dresses and snazzy tailored waistcoats are being packed away again until the next *Eurovision Song Contest*.

This year's competition, accompanied by Graham Norton's sardonic commentary, was watched on BBC1 by over ten million people, with hundreds of millions more tuning in overseas.

The latest crop of pop showed how homogenous music has become, being mostly either migraine-inducing jaunty dance numbers or ballads which start out dreary and end up overblown. Nearly all the countries' songs had English lyrics, as this traditionally attracts more votes. France's song was sung in French and came last, although it would have been merde in any language. Reassuringly, the performances included lots of kitschy stunts like a giant hamster wheel, trampolines and a circular piano keyboard. However, Austria's decision that their song would be performed by a bearded drag artist, Conchita Wurst (pictured), turned out to be more than



just another gimmick. There were petitions in Russia and Belarus for their TV stations to edit out footage of Wurst, claiming that her performance would turn the contest into a 'hotbed of sodomy'.

Wurst's song was voted as the best, not because her power ballad was much better than any of the other power ballads, but because she came to represent, in her words, 'respect and tolerance'. This nice enough message seems directed towards Russia, who received boos whenever

points were awarded to its entry (sung by two blameless seventeen year olds). Apart from Austria's win, and the usual trend for neighbours to vote for each other, it might be hard to discern much political significance in the scoring. Russia gave five points to Austria, suggesting that objections to Wurst weren't particularly strong after all. And it's anyone's guess

whether the situation between Russia and Ukraine is reflected by Russia ending up in seventh place, with four of its points coming from Ukraine, who received seven back.

The UK finished towards the bottom of the ranking, as has been the norm since the Iraq War. The scores each country awards are only partly made up by the number of viewers phoning in to vote, with panels of never-seen judges making the final decision. So at least the contest reflects the lack of real democracy in capitalism, only with more sequins.

## Meetings

For full details of all our meetings and events see our **Meetup** site: <http://www.meetup.com/The-Socialist-Party-of-Great-Britain/>

### London

Sunday 1 June 3.00pm

'The real 19th Century prophet was Dostoyevsky, not Karl Marx: Why Socialists should read Dostoyevsky'  
Guest Speaker: Dave Flynn.  
Socialist Party Head Office, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN.

### Manchester

Saturday 14 June 2.00pm

'Farming in Socialism'  
The Unicorn, 26 Church Street, Manchester M4 1PW.

### Truro

Saturday 14 June 2.00pm

'The SPGB and Historians'  
'The SPGB and the Second International'  
Speaker: Colin Skelly.  
Community Library (medium Community room, top floor), Union Place, Truro TR1 1EP.

### London

Tuesday 17 June 8.00pm

'The Economic Causes of the First World War'  
Speaker: Steve Clayton.  
Committee Room, Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace, London W4 4JN.

### Norwich

Saturday 28 June 2.00pm

'Education or Schooling?'  
Guest Speaker: D Young.  
remier Inn, Nelson Hotel, 120 Prince of Wales Road, Norwich NR1 1DX.

### Leeds

Saturday 28 June 2.00pm

Literature sales and leafleting before the meeting outside Leeds Town Hall.  
The Victoria Hotel, 28 Great George Street, Leeds LS1 3DL.

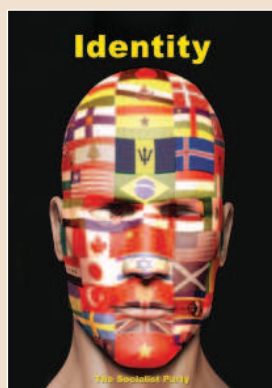
### London

Sunday 29 June 3.00pm

'July 1914: From Assassination to Mass Slaughter'  
Speaker: Gwynn Thomas.  
Socialist Party Head Office, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN.

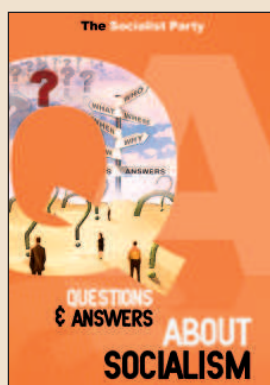


## Leaflets from The Socialist Party



**Identity**  
Examines and debunks ideas of nationalism

**Questions and Answers About Socialism**  
Answers questions non-members often ask about Socialism and The Socialist Party



**Orders:** Up to 10 £1 p and p. Over 10 and up to 50 £3 p and p. Larger orders, write for details to The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN.

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## Declaration of Principles

*This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.*

### Object

**The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.**

### Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e. land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as

a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.

4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of

the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.



# 50 Years Ago

## Mandela Speaks

IN PRETORIA Nelson Mandela has stood trial, with eight others, on charges of attempting revolution by violence. If he is found guilty—and he does not deny that he helped to organise acts of sabotage—Mandela could be sentenced to death.

It is inevitable, in the prevailing conditions and atmosphere in South Africa, that Mandela's case should arouse considerable sympathy. To many of those who resent the repressions and indignities which the coloured people of South Africa are subjected to, Mandela's admitted activities are anything but crimes. They are his people's cries for help.

It is a truism that violent repressions are bound to provoke violent resistance.



Because of this, a man in Mandela's predicament can often come to be thought of as almost a saint. But history has shown how a saint under duress

at one time, can be a devil in command at another. The past is crowded with men who have been imprisoned—and even sentenced to death—for their opposition to a repressive power and who, when they eventually themselves took over their country, proved to be no better than the power they had deposed. De Valera, Nkrumah, Ben Bella are only three like this who spring to mind.

What of Mandela?

During his trial he set out his views in a four and a half hour speech. It is instructive to examine this speech, especially some of the more revealing passages in it.

"We all (Ghandi, Nehru, Nkrumah, Nasser) accept the need for some form of Socialism to enable our people to catch up with the advanced countries of the world ..."

It is common for the leaders of rising nationalist movements to tag the name of Socialism onto the measures of state control they would like to impose to try to advance their country's economy. The correct description for these measures is state capitalism, which in large doses has often led to the imposition of a dictatorship, and which in any case never offers a country's workers a future any better than private enterprise capitalism.

(*Socialist Standard*, June 1964)

# ACTION REPLAY

## Missing the Green

A GOOD walk spoiled is the standard cliché about golf, but it seems that it is far more than a country stroll that can be ruined. According to a recent report (*Observer*, 27 April), in Surrey more land is used for golf courses than for homes. Green belt land for golf courses is fairly cheap, as the planning system means that it cannot be used for housing (and the price of land for housing has been growing rapidly in the last couple of years, especially in the south of England). Living near to a golf course can raise house prices, though.

And golf uses up more than just land. Maintaining a golf course can require enormous amounts of water, especially in drier areas such as the Mediterranean. Golf tourism, in Spain for instance, means massive demands on water, increased by the visitors who swarm to hotels near the courses. Use of pesticides can affect groundwater and the building of a course can reduce the number of local animal species. There is a Global Anti-Golf Movement ([www.antigolf.org](http://www.antigolf.org))



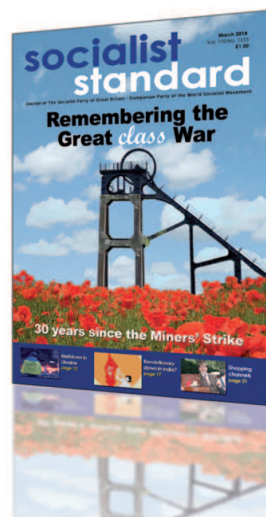
which advocates, inter alia, 'an immediate moratorium on all golf course development'.

There are many municipal courses, especially in Scotland, but for the most part courses are private property, with keep-off signs, and clubs may be exclusive and very expensive to join. It is often claimed that golfers are mostly comfortably off and in older age groups. So many will have a fair amount of disposable income, with the chance to spend freely on equipment and the socialising that is part of the game.

As a result golf is very big business, involving massive expenditures, on building courses and buying equipment. According to a 2013 report, golf contributes €15bn to the European economy (compared to €56bn in the US) and is responsible for 180,000 full-time-equivalent jobs. It did badly in the recent recession, as many people cut down on club membership, but apparently not so badly as other 'hobbies'. Golf is also seen as important for some business people, a means of building relationships with others or seeing how someone behaves under stress, how 'sporting' or fair-minded they really are. Hence its description as 'Corporate America's No. 1 pastime'. A course can even be a place to confirm business deals, so combining exercise

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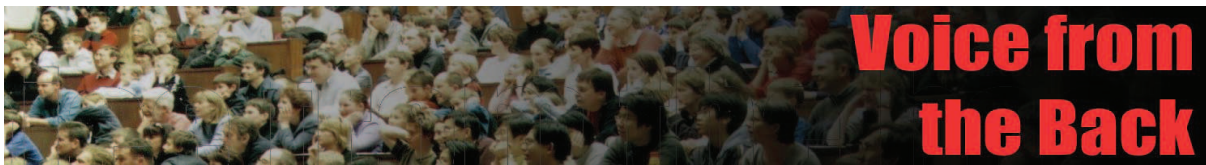
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# Voice from the Back

## The Profit Motive

The insanity of capitalism with its profits before people motivation is everywhere apparent. Millions spent on armaments while people die from lack of basic medical treatment, immense wealth accumulated by a tiny minority of parasites while millions die from lack of clean water and food, but the following news item probably sums up the madness best. 'In a wide-ranging interview with the India-based *Economic Times*, Cargill CEO David MacLennan talks about how the globe-spanning agribusiness giant managed to turn the 2008 economic crisis into a "record year of profits" a remarkable performance, given that that year's food-price spikes pushed 115 million people into hunger, as the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization estimated' (*Mother Jones*, 2 April).

## The Rich Get Richer

In last month's *Socialist Standard* we dealt with the French economist Thomas Piketty's book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* and its many short-comings, but its publication and the many reviews it has produced in the mass media has thrown up some interesting aspects of modern capitalism. Here for instances is the journalist Philip Collins in his review of the book.

'Between 1977 and 2007 the richest 1 per cent of Americans took an astonishing 60 per cent of the growth in national income. Sixty per cent. The wealth of the richest 85 people in the world is greater than that of the 3.5 billion people who make up the bottom half of the world's population' (*Times*, 2 May). Such statistics must give even the staunchest defenders of capitalism cause for concern.

## Not For The Likes Of Us

Professor Karol Sikora a former director of cancer services at Hammersmith Hospital and ex- chief of the World Health Organisation has expressed his views about treatment of the disease. 'One of Britain's top cancer doctors has called for expensive cancer drugs to be rationed for the frail elderly in favour of being given to younger patients' (*Sunday Times*, 4 May). What the doctor really means of course is the elderly and poor patients being untreated. There would be a public outcry if he meant millionaires or even members of the royal family being denied the best possible treatment. As some of the treatments cost £50,000 per year it is obviously not for the likes of us workers.

revealed officials examined a total of 16,405 cases in the past 12 months, up from 13,880 in the previous year. The number of elderly residents who claim they were abused by care home staff also rose last year to 30,785, or 600 a week' (*Daily Express*, 4 May). All sorts of proposals are put forward to deal with the situation but the reality is that the Care Homes are under-staffed and under-funded and are unlikely to be improved inside capitalism.

## The Gap Widens

The legal dispute over a divorce settlement between Silvio Berlusconi and his second wife shows the enormous gap between the millions who are trying to survive on \$2 a day and the obscene wealth of the owning class. 'Her demand

for a one-off payment of 540 million euros (£440 million) caused talks to break down. Berlusconi, who is worth an estimated 6.5 billion euros, is said to be willing to offer her 200 million euros' (*Times*, 10 May).

## Some Consolation

At one time Britain was the wealthiest and most powerful nation in the world but these days are long gone. There is one economic category though where Britain still leads the world. 'The number of billionaires

living in the UK has risen to more than 100 for the first time, according to the 2014 *Sunday Times Rich List*. There are now 104 billionaires based in the UK with a combined wealth of more than £301bn, the list says. That means the UK has more billionaires per head of population than any other country' (*BBC News*, 11 May). This must be a wonderful boost to Britain's unemployed and homeless!



Old people in state care having a nice day out

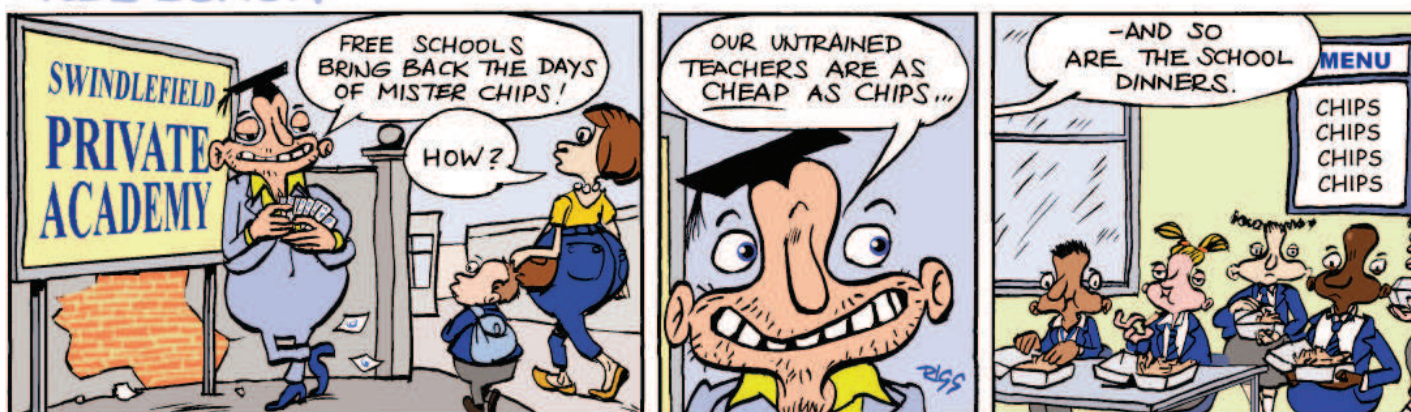
Good lord, you're that Nazi chap, what?

Shut up, Philip, or nurse will take you home

## Growing Old Disgracefully

After a lifetime of hard work many thousands of workers because of ill-health and ageing find themselves reduced to living in a so-called Care Home. 'The Care Quality Commission, which carries out inspections of homes, this week confirmed that in the past three years warnings were issued to 1,200 homes, of which 158 were forced to close. .... A request to 150 councils

## FREE LUNCH



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